

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANILA 03645 301303 Z

52

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 RSR-01 CIAE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14 USIA-12

OMB-01 IO-12 AID-20 PC-15 TRSE-00 COME-00 AGR-20 EB-11

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R 301019 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4133

INFO DEPT DEFENSE

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

CINCPACREPHIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 3645

DEFENSE FOR DIA ALSO

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: RP/ PINS/ MARR

SUBJPT: GOP STILL STALLED IN MUSLIM CONFLICT

REF: MANILA 3200 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY. AS AREA OF MUSLIM DISTURBANCE HAS
SPREAD, PHIL MILITARY FORCES REMAIN STRETCHED THIN.
ATROCITIES HAVE BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO MUSLIMS, ADN PHIL
AIRCRAFT USING NAPALM ON OCCASION. THE IDENTITY
OF LEADERSHIP AND COMMAND STRUCTURE OF THE INSURGENTS
REMAINS UNCLEAR. GOVT POLITICAL INITIATIVES,
INCLUDING AN AMNESTY OFFER, HAVE NOT YET PRODUCED
RESULTS, AND PROSPECTS ARE THAT SITUATION WILL
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PAGE 02 MANILA 03645 301303 Z

BECOME WORSE BEFORE IT GETS BETTER. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING PAST TEN DAYS GOP SEEMS TO HAVE MADE LITTLE PROGRESS IN RESOLVING CONFRONTATION WITH MUSLIMS. CONFLICT HAS NOW EXTENDED TO COASTAL AREAS OF BOTH ZAMBOANGA PROVINCES, AND MUSLIMS RECENTLY CAPTURED AND HELD FOR SOME TIME LARGE RICE STORES ACCUMULATED IN TOWN OF LABANGAN, ADJACENT TO ZAMBOANGA SUR CAPITAL OF PAGADIAN CITY.

2. MUSLIM INSURGENTS APPARENTLY RETAIN INITIATIVE IN NORTH COTABATO, BASILAN ISLAND AND SULU ARCEIPELAGO. BUILDUP OF MUSLIM STRENGTH IN SOUTHEAST CORNER OF NORTH COTABATO, WHICH ARMED FORCES PHILIPPINES (AFP) ESTIMATES, OR PROBABLY CONSIDERABLY OVER- ESTIMATES, AT 2,000 - 3,000 MEN, IS CAUSING CONSIDERABLE CONCERN AMONG LARGELY CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN IMPORTANT PORT OF GENERAL SANTOS, WHICH LIES DIRECTLY TO THE SOUTH.

3. WHILE AFP BRIEFING OFFICER HAS SEVERAL TIMES TOLD DAO THAT GOVT FORCES HAVE INITIATIVE, OTHER ACCOUNTS PICTURE GOVT FORCES AS LARGELY ON THE DEFENSIVE. PHILIPPINE AIR FORCE (PAF) COLONEL TOLD CEBU CONSUL THAT HE CONSIDERED PHIL MILITARY POSITIONS AROUND COTABATO CITY, AND PARTICULARLY ITS AIRPORT, VERY THIN AND SUSCEPTIBLE TO MUSLIM ATTACK. SAME CONDITIONS MAY APPLY TO JOLO AND TAWI- TAWI, WHERE PHIL FORCES APPEAR RESTRICTED TO VERY LIMITED AREAS AND STATIC DEFENSE. PAF PLANES, WHICH ARE NOW USING NAPALM ON OCCASION, APPEAR MAIN INSTRUMENT FOR ACTIVE GOP MILITARY PRESSURE AT THIS TIME.

4. AFP GROUND FORCES IN AREA ARE BEING BUILT UP, HOWEVER, BY ARMING BARRIO SELF DEFENCE UNITS (BSDUS) AND BY " KAMAGONG" UNITS. THESE LATTER APPARENTLY LUMP RECENT RECRUITS WITH A CADRE COMPONENT OF REGULARS; THERE IS OFFICIAL OPTIMISM THAT THEY WILL BE EFFECTIVE IN COMAT. AFP OFFICER BRIEFING DAO REPORTED MARCH 30 THAT PHIL MILITARY HAD SUFFERED WELL OVER 100 KILLED IN ACTION SINCE MARCH 1, WITH MAJORITY OF LOSSES IN NORTH COTABATO FIGHTING. (EMBASSY BELIEVES, HOWEVER, THAT LOSSES ARE CONSIDERABLY LARGER THAN AFP ADMITS.)
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PAGE 03 MANILA 03645 301303 Z

5. THERE ARE ALSO DISQUIETING REPORTS, STILL KEPT OUT OF LOCAL PRESS, OF BURNINGS OF HOUSES AND WHOLE VILLAGES, BEHEADINGS, RAPE AND LOOTING. WHILE THESE ARE LARGELY ATTRIBUTED TO MUSLIM INSURGENTS, THERE COULD BE INCREASE IN VIOLENCE ON BOTH SIDES, PARTICULARLY IF AFP FORCES ARE SUPPLEMENTED WITH MORE FANATIC LOCAL CHRISTIAN TYPES.

6. ONE APPARENT GOP DISADVANTAGE IS THAT NATURE AND DIMENSIONS OF INSURGENT THREAT ARE NOT CLEARLY ESTABLISHED. IDENTITIES OF MUSLIM REVOLUTIONARY FORCES (MRF) FIELD LEADERS IN MOST CASES REMAIN UNKNOWN ALTHOUGH IMPRESSION PERSISTS THAT THESE ARE YOUNGER MUSLIM ELEMENTS NOT PARTICULARLY RESPONSIVE TO TRADITIONAL DATUS AND POLITICAL OVERLORDS. SIMILARLY UNCLEAR IS ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT OF MAOIST GUERRILLAS OF NPA PERSUASION AND CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND.

7. ALSO EXTENT OF FOREIGN INFLUENCE IS MOST UNCERTAIN. ALTHOUGH AFP BELIEVES NUMBER OF INSURGENTS TO HAVE BEEN TRAINED IN MALAYSIA, IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT THEY HAVE EVIDENCE OF PARTICIPATION BY MALAYSIAN OR OTHER FOREIGN NATIONALS IN FIGHTING. WHAT IS APPARENT IS THAT MUSLIM TACTICAL OPERATIONS ARE CONDUCTED WITH MORE SKILL THAN HERETOFORE AND THAT INSURGENT FORCES APPEAR WELL SUPPLIED WITH WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION. (DEFECTION OF SEVERAL MUSLIM OFFICERS AND NON- COMS FROM AFP MAY EXPLAIN IN PART INCREASE IN SKILL.)

8. EXTENSION OF GOVT AMNESTY OFFER TO APRIL 15 HAS NOT YET ELICITED SIGNIFICANT RESPONSE AND, IN FACT, PHIL MILITARY TEND TO BLAME THIS EXTENSION FOR RESTRAINTS PLACED ON MORE AGGRESSIVE AFP ACTION. PARTLY BECAUSE LEADERSHIP AND MOTIVATION OF REVOLT ARE OBSCURE, GOP APPEARS TO HAVE MADE LITTLE PROGRESS TOWARD POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. WITH GOVT COUNTERMEASURES MOVING SLOWLY, SITUATION PROMISES TO BECOME WORSE BEFORE IT COULD GET BETTER.
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*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

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